

# York parents seek money for youth athletic program

## Character-building is group's focus

By Jennifer Andes  
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A group of York County parents has a dream to use athletics to teach responsibility and discipline to Hampton Roads children and teenagers.

The parents have formed the Youth America Fitness Association and are hoping to raise contributions from area businesses with the aim of building a \$12 million athletic facility in York County. They have three sites in mind and would like to open next year if the money can be raised.

They expect to begin operations this spring with a \$140,000 temporary gymnasium they plan to build in York County, said Dennis Pearce, president of the association's five-member board of directors and general manager of Old Dominion Recycling.

Membership would be open to all Hampton Roads school-age children who agree to one stipulation: They would have to sign a contract promising not to smoke, drink or swear; to show up on time for practices; and to treat adults with respect.

"The entire youth facility will be based around becoming responsible citizens," said Joseph E. Wallace, Youth America vice president and a veterinarian with Tabb Animal Clinic.

Participants would be required to do well in school and act responsibly, Pearce said.

If a student has been skipping classes, he said, "He's in trouble with

us, too."

Youth America expects to have a waiting list, so students would know that if they were expelled someone else would take their place, he said.

Parents would also have to sign the contract so they were aware of the rules, Pearce said.

Pearce has been a coach for the Independent James-York Youth Wrestling League for six years. Board members along with Pearce and Wallace are Dan Fields, executive vice president and assistant principal of Lafayette High School; David Fields, secretary and a therapeutic recreation specialist; and Sandy Wason, treasurer and a counselor at Grafton Bethel Elementary School.

So far, board members say, they have received nearly \$200,000 in donations of cash, land and attorneys' fees. A dozen construction, landscaping, plumbing and electrical companies have pledged to help, Pearce said.

The board has created a fund-raising task force of 20 parents who will visit businesses seeking donations this month, Pearce said.

The association is targeting businesses, he said, because, "we think they will share our views of the decline in morals and social decline in general."

The temporary gym would open this spring, possibly in the Ashe Industrial Park.

By the summer of 1996, the group would like to have the larger, \$12 million facility operational, although completion of that facility might take three or more years depending on how fund raising proceeds, he said.

The fund-raising goal is ambi-

tious. By comparison, the Peninsula YMCA raised \$2.3 million during a two-year campaign several years ago.

"It was very difficult to reach that goal," said Danny Carroll, YMCA executive director. "We worked very hard."

Pearce said he is aiming for a total of \$6 million in corporate donations, combined with low-interest loans, membership dues and other revenue sources.

Federal grants are an option, he said, provided those grants would not interfere with the association's objectives. For example, members would be required to say the pledge of allegiance, and the association would reserve the right to expel students who break the rules.

The large gym would be built in one of three possible sites in York County, one of which is a 26-acre wooded site behind Tabb High School, Pearce said. The association is currently negotiating with all three landowners, he said.

The group foresees a gym including indoor basketball, volleyball and tennis courts, a wrestling room, batting cages and pitching machines, Pearce said. Baseball, soccer, football, field hockey and softball fields would be built, along with concession stands, announcers' booths and restrooms, he said.

The facility would be built to serve 1,000 or more students in kindergarten through 12th grade, he said. Eventually, the association hopes to open a non-sectarian private school on the site, Pearce said.

All participants would pay membership fees, Pearce said. Families who can't afford the fees may receive financial aid once a foundation is established, he said.